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GRETCHEN'S GIFT;

OR,

A NOBLE SACRIFICE.

An Original Tale.

BY

A. L. S.

Agnes L. Sadlier

NEW YORK:

D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 31 Barclay Street.

MONTREAL 275 NOTRE DAME STREET.

Jordan *P23 , S125 Gr

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GRETCHEN'S GIFT.

JAKOB DIETZ lived in the old stone house upon the hill, a crazy, rambling structure, which bowed and shook before the keen north wind as if imploring its mercy.

In former years it had not so desolate a look. Before the Revolutionary days, an honest, thrifty farmer tilled and sowed the yielding hillsides, and they rose from the meadow-land's green bosom teeming with rich produce. But war sent a trumpet-call throughout the land; the farmer threw down his scythe, and hastened to a place in the ranks of those toilers for freedom, and the farm was tilled no longer.

Next, its stout old walls sheltered the British soldiers; its long, low-roofed rooms rang to uproarious mirth and echoed their toasts of confusion to the rebels. It was during this time that the grand old forest-trees which had shaded it in summer, and shook so fiercely over it in winter, were hewn down wherever they obstructed the view, or, in fact, when it suited the caprice of its quondam owners.

A few years passed, and peace emerged from the discord of two nations and smiled with added beauty upon the victors. The interrupted tide of emigration again swept their hospitable shores, and from its elevated place the old house glared upon numerous homesteads rising in the midst of cultivated fields, but it alone remained empty. Its former owner never appeared to claim his own, and soon people began to fear and shun it as if something uncanny had claimed the old house for its awful dwelling. Thoughts begot by superstition grow marvellously fast into words, and soon become established truth to their propagators. Thus they listened with avidity to the following tale concerning the old house, which, old Robert Laird averred, had been told dozens of times at his father's fireside.

As often happened in those days of

strife, two brothers held different political opinions. The elder clung to the faith of his father and was a Tory; the younger joined the handful of struggling colonists and fought under Ethan Allen. One day a small detachment of his regiment, he among the number, was surprised and captured by a party of British, among whom was his brother. The British conducted their prisoners to the old house, where they were stationed.

During the evening the sight of his young brother captive, appealed to the soldier's heart with all the power of affection transmitted by one blood and race, and at last, duty was forgotten. He happened to be sentry that night. Hastening to his brother's room, he

showed him a plan of escape, of which the latter, after many arguments, consented to take advantage. As' the two, so strangely hurried together, so strangely parted, were interchanging a last "good-by," the warmth of which no political opinions could dampen, they were discovered. The sergeant in command, a man notorious throughout the army for brutality, sentenced the elder brother to death, and he was accordingly hanged the next morning before the windows; and to increase the horror of this example to all future offenders, his brother was forced to view the awful scene, and it was not until the quivering body had stilled for ever, that a swoon mercifully obscured his senses, which never returned. He rose from a bed of sickness a harmless, roving maniac, who haunted with melancholy persistence the scene of the awful spectacle during life, and, it was believed, visited it from the other world.

Such was the story, whether true or false, which gave the place an ill-repute, and, despite its choice situation, prevented any purchaser from appearing. The wide wooden gates, through which formerly the patient oxen passed at sunset, hung broken from their hinges, and there remained no trace of the footpath made by hurrying feet so long ago. The low, heavy entrancedoor was covered with numberless scales, like some mighty fish—records of many violent assaults of wind and

weather. Above in the eaves swallows dwelt in colonies, and chirped forth the only sound that broke the solitude.

Such was the appearance of the forsaken homestead when, one cool morning in the early spring-time, two farmers, on their way to market, beheld about it signs of real work-a-day life.

An old man, with stooped shoulders and long gray hair, was busily employed in repairing the gate. A box of tools lay near him, and a huge dog, of magnificent proportions, lay stretched at full length upon the grass a short distance away.

The news that a tenant or buyer had at last taken the house was confirmed that evening, when eager, anxious eyes saw a light stream out from the small diamond-paned windows, and curiosity immediately boiled over to learn the name of the hardy purchaser.

Little by little it transpired that the new household consisted of but three persons—old Jakob Dietz, a middleaged woman named Frederica, and little golden-haired Gretchen. Their names betrayed their nationality. It was surmised that the little one was the old man's grandchild, and Frederica her nurse. But further than this probability failed to support the thousand conjectures formed about the family. Each had his or her pet theory concerning them—one that the woman had been old Jakob Dietz's accomplice in some crime, for which, in order to escape detection, they had been forced to flee their country; others that it was he who had stolen little Gretchen from noble parents, and had simply hired the aged *frau* to take charge of her.

One point all agreed on—that the child was not theirs. Those who had been fortunate enough to obtain a near view declared that her eyes were as blue as the summer skies, and her hair of a shining golden color. Now, old Jakob had a singularly repelling look; his eyes were of the smallest size compatible with sight, and of a greenish gray color. And as for old Frederica, she regarded one with a pair of the keenest black orbs, and from under her cap, although her hair was fast turning gray, it might

be seen that its original color matched her eyes

But however cold or repelling either of little Gretchen's guardians were to the neighbors who sought to cultivate acquaintance, to her they were all love and tenderness. Little Gretchen's first remembrances were of being watched and tended by Frederica, of being soothed and caressed in baby troubles in the old man's arms. She remembered many a shifting scene in her young life. Now they lived in the noise and rush of a city, under the eternal shadow of a mighty church. Through the long, dim aisles she had wandered while Frederica told her beads before Our Blessed Lady's shrine, and had gazed wonderingly at

the tender, loving piety of the beautiful faces, creations of some mighty master, that looked on her from above. And often the sound of low, soft music, as from some distant choir, would wake gently the solemn stillness, and it was then she loved it best. An indefinable sensation, half-happiness, half-pain, always stirred her heart almost to bursting when listening to music. Often, though vainly, she strove to explain it to Frederica. The good woman loved music, like all her nation, but she loved best that which rang so loudly to the lofty carved ceiling at High Mass. She thought the plaintive music too sad, and eagerly recommended Gretchen not to think of it when it had passed.

Then Gretchen remembered a jour-

ney, partly by water, and they dwelt again in the busy city; but this time there was no church near by. Frederica and herself were hurried along through a mighty throng on the streets, who spoke in a strange tongue. The city was much larger and the people seemed more busy. All day long the numbers of passers-by seemed never to diminish. Awhile they lived here, and then embarked for a long journey on the sea. Many, many days and nights they sailed, until one morning she was awakened by Frederica, who told her their journey was finished on the sea, and Gretchen, going on deck, saw that the ship was moored at the docks of a city. After a little delay they landed and three days' journey brought them

to their present home. And soon Gretchen loved the old house almost as well as that in the quaint old German town of which she was always reminding Frederica. She loved to wander through its wide, low-ceiled rooms, for she was perfectly fearless; to climb gently to the windows and watch the birds at work in the eaves; or even to ascend by a ladder to the roof and look about the country. Then, in the long, quiet evenings, she would tell her adventures to her loving listeners.

After, when the long summer days had come, she would call Fritz, the great dog, who from his shady resting-place would rise, and, shaking himself, follow his little mistress over hill and

valley. About half a mile from the house there was a spot which Gretchen loved better than all others. Two lofty hills rose to an equal height, and between them was a gorge, through which, in summer, a tiny rivulet hastened down, growing as it went, until it reached the table-ground a good-sized brook; and here Gretchen used to rest on the long, deep grass and listen to its soft, low murmur.

Afterwards Gretchen learned that her little brook grew very formidable in winter, when it came rushing down, swollen with the great rains. The six huge stones, of which two were almost sufficient to choke it altogether now, it then sometimes almost covered, and

had, indeed, once been known to do so completely.

Summer passed into autumn, winter with its long nights came, and spring, returning, brought again the day on which a year ago they had come to the old house. And so time passed, until seven years had come and gone and Gretchen had grown into a maiden of fourteen years. Yet so slight and frail was she, and of so small a stature, that she appeared much less. Still, in the long winter evenings she sat at the · old man's feet and sang, and he instructed her with the manner and air of one who both knew and loved music well. A great and glorious voice he recognized as the child's birthright, and · he cultivated the noble gift, although

each note woke memories of a bitter past. Once, indeed, he had bade her sing no more that evening, and abruptly retired; and when Gretchen questioned Frederica upon his strange conduct, the old woman muttered something of her looking like her mother.

"Listen, then, Frederica," replied Gretchen. "I will sing no more to him, since it moves him so deeply to be reminded of her."

"Nein, nein!" replied the old woman, "that would be fine, indeed, to to have him blame me then for mentioning her to you. I mean not that, either," she continued, seeing a strange expression gather on the girl's face; "only he loved her so much he has not ever quite got over her loss, and mentioning her name reminds him of her. So promise me, little one, that you will not speak of it to him."

Thus urged, Gretchen complied and appeared to forget the matter.

It was now the middle of January and the ground was covered with snow, which the intensely cold weather had frozen so as to afford splendid travel to sleighs. Frederica, therefore, determined to go over to H--- for some articles which were wanted for the house. She was detained longer than she expected, and the early night had fallen before the sound of bells told on the cold, crisp air that she had come. Gretchen flew to the door, threw it open and greeted the old nurse with as warm a welcome

as if she had come from the North Pole.

After the old woman had removed her wrappings, she took from her pocket a letter and handed it to her master, saying: "Herr Jakob, this letter has been lying in the post-office for two weeks."

The old man, with a start, took it from her, and, tearing it open, began to read it eagerly.

Frederica meanwhile busied herself in placing upon the pine table, white as driven snow, the evening meal which Gretchen's deft fingers had prepared. During its progress the child questioned Frederica, and listened delighted to all the doings and sayings which went to make up the current

of news in a country town forty years ago.

From his distant corner Fritz raised himself slowly and with difficulty—for he was now in the unkind grasp of old age—and came over to the hearth, from whence he looked at his young mistress with his soft, faithful brown eyes, as if beseeching her not to forget him in busy conversation.

Nor did she; for while Frederica washed the Delft-ware and arranged it again on the shelves above the table, the young girl placed many a choice bit on the platter and laid it before him on the hearth, to his great satisfaction.

Then, when the hearth was swept and the fire stirred until its ruddy light blazed high and bright, she came in obedience to the old man's sign and seated herself on the low stool at his feet, and sang as he bade her a quaint old German ballad. But the weird, slow music seemed for once to fall upon unheeding ears. His eyes were closed and his head bent with the air of one who ponders deeply. When the song had ceased he leaned down and took her face in both his hands, and said:

"My little Gretchen, to-night thou shalt sing no more to me, but I will tell thee a tale of what will seem to thee the olden time."

Generally at this proposition the child's face had been used to flush with delight and eagerness, but to-night, re-

membering the letter, together with the unusual solemnity of the old man's voice and manner, she felt troubled and uneasy, and waited for his words with dread.

"Little Gretchen," he began, in deep, sonorous tones, "forty years ago there came journeying on foot to the gates of a great city a poor unknown youth. Ugly and repulsive, his one sole gift from the good God was musical genius, and he sought in the crowded places for some skilful hand to spring back the massive lock which ignorance kept upon the treasure. Many, many a weary day and sleepless night tortured his burning heart, and suspense grew greater than he could bear, when at last one day, as he sat at Ves-

per service, weeping bitterly with the organ, which, too, seemed to wail in sadness, a hand touched his shoulder, and, looking up, he beheld an old man with deep, peaceful eyes and long gray beard sweeping his breast. He beckoned the youth to follow him, who obeyed, until they reached the quiet, deserted street, for it was now evening. Then, pausing, the stranger questioned him as to the cause of his grief, listened to the story of his hopes and failures with deep interest, and said: 'My poor youth, I am one of those you seek; my whole life has been devoted to music, and I now teach many pupils. Come to this address to-morrow before noon, and I will talk with you further.' "Then, kindly pressing the youth's

hand, he quitted him and was soon lost in the gathering evening shadows.

"The following day the young man presented himself at the house indicated and was instantly admitted to the professor's presence. One interview sufficed to found a friendship that only ceased with life. The old man loved the youth because of his passionate gratitude and the enthusiasm with which he applied himself to the study of his great art, and the younger loved him as we love one who gives to us the realization of our heart's desire.

"Time went on, and three years had elapsed since his first meeting with the capelmeister, when one day, as he sat waiting in his master's house for his coming, the door opened and a maiden

entered whom he rightly supposed to be his benefactor's daughter Cicely. Long plaits of shining golden hair fell far below her waist, and her eyes were deep and blue as one of our mountain lakes. With a half-bashful but smiling air she approached, and, having enquired his name, informed him that her father had left word that he could not return until late, but desired that he should wait his coming. Nothing loath, the young man obeyed, but Cicely, after having conversed for a short time, disappeared, nor did he behold her again until, her father having returned, they were summoned to supper.

"Little by little the maiden became more friendly and intimate in their intercourse," but the youth strove to

smother in his heart the love he felt for her. What possible claim, his reason urged, could he ever hope to gain upon the affection of one so beautiful and gifted as Cicely? When, kneeling in the choir, he saw her rapt and inspired beauty as her voice floated high above the rest in the grand chants of High Mass, a tinge of awe mixed with his love, as if he had set it on a thing too holy. Thus for ten long years his great patient affection dwelt silent within the closed doors of his heart, until there came a time when the professor lay upon his death-bed, and Cicely was soon to be alone in the world. Then the voice of his love broke silence. Cicely, in the midst of her great grief, gave obedient consent

to her father's wish, and knelt by his bedside as he clasped her hand in that of his loved pupil, and with his last breath blessed them.

"The pair thus strangely betrothed were married without waiting for the time allotted to mourning. The loss sustained was almost as great in one case as the other, for the daughter's betrothed husband had loved her father with the love of a son, and it was deemed better that the maiden should have a protector as soon as possible; therefore one morning in the early summer they were married, and came down the church steps to the old home that Cicely loved so well.

"Four happy years followed, and then another summer morning, when the soft air came through the open lattice, sweet with the fragrance of roses, her husband knelt by Cicely, and heard her dying words as she thanked him in low, weak murmurs for all the love and kindness that had brightened her short married life. No need to describe the grief that overflowed his heart as he told her of how she had been to him a source of happiness greater than any he could have given her—deeper and more satisfying even than his art could breathe into his soul. A few days, and another gray stone cross marked in the quiet cemetery the spot where Cicely, after her short and holy life, slept beside her father, and another pair of deep blue eyes gazing into a father's face told him that Heaven claimed its own, but entrusted to his care another life.

"He named his baby daughter Gretchen; for he could not bear that even his child should bear the name which memory consecrated to his wife.

"As the little Gretchen grew up, her father perceived that her mother's gift of beauty was hers and their united gift of music.

"But here resemblance to either ceased. The touchstone of her nature was ambition. A deep-rooted pride and desire to be foremost in the world's throng, to command homage by her genius—these were her ever-present thoughts; and when cut off from any opening for her cherished plans—for her father refused to allow her at eighteen

years of age to accept the offer of a director to procure her an engagement in one of the great capitals of Europe—she became dissatisfied and discontented with her lot.

"At last, unhappily, her wishes began to assume reality. As her father waited for her one evening in the chancel, as she sang at Vesper service, he observed a young man, evidently a stranger, linger after all the worshippers had departed. His air and appearance indicated a high station of life, as well as they showed his foreign birth. He looked closely at Gretchen as she passed, and her father observed that he followed them home, though at a distance. Thus for many days he watched Gretchen to and from the church,

but always maintaining a most respectful demeanor, until their meeting chanced thus:

"At that time Gretchen was accustomed to go three times a week to the house of a certain Frau von Liessen, to teach music to her three daughters.

"This lady lived in a distant part of the city, and Gretchen was accustomed to leave her house whilst it was still early, and so arrive at home before nightfall."

But upon this particular day the frau besought her to stay, saying that she wished her to sing for a number of guests who were even now in the salon. Gretchen at first hesitated, saying that her father would be anxious about her absence, but finally yielded

to the frau's entreaties, as well as to the promptings of vanity, which whispered that here an opportunity at last presented itself for winning the laurels in this aristocratic company which had already been conferred upon her elsewhere.

"Therefore she followed the frau into the large and magnificently-furnished salon with trembling steps but proud, triumphant heart. All present were touched by her youthful grace and beauty, and as she took her place at the piano a half-audible murmur of applause broke the deep silence. What nectar so sweet, what spur so effective, as that of applause? Gretchen sang as she had never sung before; higher and more liquid rose the

full notes, until they seemed to rival the harmony of angels.

"Intoxicated with success, and craving the swift, certain applause which she knew would follow each effort, the young girl sang on and never marked the lapse of time, until a servant, entering, lit the numerous waxen tapers which stood in candelabra about the room, and reminded her that it was evening and she was a long distance from home.

"Gretchen had a grateful and affectionate, heart, and, knowing the anxiety which her father would feel at her absence, she reproached herself bitterly for having delayed to such an hour. Hastily approaching an alcove where she saw Frau von Liessen engaged in

conversation, she waited impatiently until a suitable opening presented itself, and took leave, saying she must return home at once.

"'Yes, my dear child,' responded the lady, 'but not alone; it is far too late. My maid Katrina shall accompany you. You can tell her as you pass the housekeeper's room on your way out.'

"Gretchen thanked her and turned to go, when she for the first time saw that a gentleman, the same whom she had so often seen going to and from church, was standing in the alcove watching her.

"Katrina, upon receiving her mistress' message, donned her outdoor garments and led the way into the street. An early moon had risen, and the calm, peaceful light rested upon the old city, lending it a new and tender beauty.

"The woman drew her young charge's arm within hers, and they hastened along the solitary street. Suddenly the sound of a quick, firm footfall came through the stillness, and in a few moments the same gentleman whom Gretchen had seen in the alcove a short time before came up to them, and respectfully uncovering his head, said gravely: 'Pardon me, fraulein, but it is too late for you to go through the streets even with this attendant. I will, with your permission, attend you home. Katrina knows me,' he continued quietly. 'I am slightly related to Frau von Liessen, and was her guest at the entertainment this afternoon.'

"Thus reassured, Gretchen walked on between her guardians, and after a little learned to answer in a firm voice the questions which the stranger asked in such deep, quiet tones. Frankly she told him of all her hopes and future plans, of winning by the power of her song the laurel of fame, of her desire to see strange countries and sing to a strange people.

"'Do you think, then, they would welcome you better than the audiences of your own country, fraulein?' he questioned curiously.

"'Yes,' responded the young singer; that which we have we never prize so

dearly as when others exult over it. Those whom we have seen grow up among us, counted their failures, numbered their nearer aimings at success, do not wring from us that involuntary, startled admiration that is the tribute to a new-comer's perfect work. We have been too near, and watched the painful ascent, the repeated falls, and treacherous slips, and though we respect the toiler for his victory, we see no magic in its execution.'

"'Think you, then,' said the stranger hastily, 'that the ties of race and blood and country are so easily broken? To me it seems, fraulein, these should but add another charm to find favor in a people's heart, and nowhere, in my estimation, should a singer's tones rise

grander or with truer ring than in the spot where first was felt the heaven-born power. Home sanctifies all ordinary gifts.'

"'But the heritage of song is not an ordinary gift, and cannot be judged by the heart's ordinary rules,' said Gretchen hastily. 'See,' she continued, for they stood now upon the low wooden bridge which forded the narrow river-'see! this river, flowing so quietly to the sea, reflects to-night, as it has every starry night since its first flow, Orion's shining belt. Did God to-morrow place it in another hemisphere, it would reflect the Southern Cross as brilliantly within its bosom. Thus is the heart of a singer. The people who welcome and

crown her she reflects in her heart's depths.'

"As she stood thus, grasping with one slight hand the wooden rail and pointing with the other outstretched arm to the constellation she had first named, the bell from a neighboring tower tolled the hour of eight. In the momentary stillness that ensued the lapping of the water sounded faint but clear beneath the bridge; then Gretchen, startled, turned, exclaiming: 'Alas! Katrina, I knew not that the time fled so fast. The hour is later by half than I thought, and we must make haste.'

"The remaining distance, however, to Gretchen's home was but short and soon traversed. Her father met them at the door, and after hearing the unex-

pected incidents of the day, thanked the gentleman for his kindness, assuring him that he had laid him under a deep obligation.

"' If you really wish to repay me for a simple act of duty,' said the stranger gravely, 'permit me to come here sometimes and hear your daughter sing. It is a favor I would value mere than you imagine.'

"Dreading to appear ungrateful, and yet with a vague presentiment of trouble, the father gave the requested permission, and the stranger, after a few more courteous words, departed. The following evening he returned, and listened with undiminished pleasure to song after song which Gretchen poured forth in the still, moonlit room. And

so for many months he came each evening to the old house, and listened as silently as if he sat indeed at the feet of music's Muse herself.

"When he first came he had given his name as Raymond, and told them that he was an Englishman. Further than this they enquired not; but, as they came to know him better, and time had rendered his presence familiar, the stranger's grave, earnest' manner and noble appearance inspired deep trust in both. Gretchen soon learned to watch for his coming—the one whose applause was never stinted and whose criticism never sounded harsh-and by degrees her father relaxed the vigilance with which at first he had marked their meeting.

"He often withdrew to the balcony by the open lattice, and there smoked his evening pipe as he listened to Gretchen's songs, recalling days long past when another voice as sweet, if not so grand, awoke his heart to love.

"One still, sultry evening he had retired to the farther end of the balcony from the open window, endeavoring to catch the faint breeze which floated fitfully over the city, and there sat absorbed in deep reverie. In the quiet room Gretchen sat at the piano, her hands idly wandering over the white keys, forming deep, echoing chords at will. Herr Raymond sat near her, but without expressing any wish to hear her sing as usual. A deep preoccupation seemed to engross his

mind, and it was a long time before he looked up and said:

- "'Fraulein, you have sung for many nights for me; have you never had any curiosity to know the name of one to whom you have given so much pleasure?'
- "'You told my father at first that you were Herr Raymond, and I have always thought since that was your name,' replied the young girl.
- "'No, Gretchen,' he answered, 'my first name is Raymond, but my whole name is Raymond Vane. Now, try to say it as I do.'
- "'Raymond Vane,' repeated the young girl, the unfamiliar sounds falling in broken musical utterances from the smiling mouth.

"'That is right,' he said encouragingly; 'and now, little Gretchen, listen, for I have something very important to ask you.'

"'To ask me, Herr Raymond?' questioned Gretchen in a tone of wonder.
'Of what use can I, a poor, obscure girl, be to one so great and rich as you?'

"'Of more use than any one in the world, strange as you think it, little one,' he answered. 'You know, Gretchen, I am an Englishman. My father and mother are both dead, and I was an only child. Far off, in one of England's beauty-famed counties, stands my inheritance, a grand old manor, shut in on every side by the sweeping glades of an English park, and overshadowed by ancient

oaks and spreading elms. Such is my home, which has waited silent and lonely for my coming for many years. But I could not bear to return and live among scenes with the memory of the dead alone to bear me company. I had resolved to lead the wandering kind of life which I have pursued since my mother's death, until one evening, as I sat in the cathedral near by, I heard your voice rise in the Vesper service, sweet and clear. So remarkable a voice even in this favored land attracted me, and soon I grew to love its possessor for herself. Gretchen,'he continued, raising her right hand as it hung listless by her side, 'do you love me well enough to leave your fatherland and be my wife?"

"It was as if Gretchen stood in a flood of sunlight stronger than human eyes could bear when those words fell upon her wondering ears. The knowledge that she held for the moment the direction of her life in her own hands. mingled with the surprise of the offer of marriage from one whom, even in her wildest dreams, she had never invested with such a wish, almost stunned her. Raymond Vane, seeing her agitation, begged her to speak of it no more that night, and determined to address her father next morning.

"What need to prolong the details of the stranger's wooing? What entreaties will save the flower from the ruthless hand that is stretched out to rend it from the parent stem, or who can convince the flower that in the humble garden of its birth happiness is nearer than in the brilliant places which it is plucked to adorn?

"After a time of tears and regrets checkered by bright anticipations with which hope painted the future, the day came for Gretchen to cut those ties which on this earth were never to be reunited. Before the high altar of the familiar cathedral the simple, humble German girl stood, the bride of the rich and noble Englishman, and that day's twilight, which saw them on the sea embarked for his ancestral home. saw her sorrowing father seated in the old home, where time had shown him so many changes, only to make him again as lonely as upon the day when he had come, friendless and weary, to the city gates.

"The days wore into weeks, the months hastened by, and only once brought tidings from his darling-telling much of the place and people, and their ways and customs, but allowing little to be gathered of the happiness of her life. This did not serve to quiet the fears which so unlikely a union had raised in his heart. He knew Gretchen had always been of an eager, communicative disposition, quick to relate her happiness to those she loved; and therefore, as the year closed and another went through its course, his fears grew into certainty that the bait which had lured his darling from him had not drawn her into happier places. Each

day he faithfully fulfilled his duties as capellmeister, but, as he led the choir, amid the mingling voices hers seemed to rise, not with the brilliancy which had distinguished it of old, but with a murmur of soft entreaty, as if the call of one in sorrow. Now in the evening his reveries were of Gretchen; he knew the dead was happy, but for the living he mourned.

"At last, after two years had gone by, the father sat in his accustomed place one evening, and turned over and over in his mind a project which had seized him with intolerable longing—to go and seek his daughter. If she should be happy, if her silence should prove only a natural forgetfulness of things below her present station, he would retrace his steps and trouble her no longer; but if she pined for her old German home, and starved amid a strange people for the bread of familiar voices and faces, he would bring her back at any cost.

"After the night which saw this determination recorded in the cappelmeister's will, the dawn was but breaking upon the old German city as he, restless and unable to sleep, left his dwelling to roam about its familiar streets. But as he descended the steps his attention was immediately attracted by what seemed a large bundle, but upon examination proved to be a sleeping infant. It needed not the paper on its breast to tell him whose it was; the sleeping features were Gret-

chen's own. So had she lain in his arms full many times. So did Providence guide her child to that safe resting-place.

"With deep emotion he pressed the child to his heart and carried it into the house; then with eager haste he unfastened the little missive and read the following, blurred with tears:

"'MY FATHER: The daisy is happiest in the field, the violet in the lowly shadow; therefore I confide my Margaret to you. Teach her, as you taught me, how to be contented, and may your counsel prove more successful in her life than it did in mine. Farewell, my loved father! Do not seek me to restore the precious gift. I give it for the best. I have been nearer

to you than you imagined, but now am gone for ever.'

"'Your unhappy daughter,

"' GRETCHEN VANE."

"Such was the only clue which the young mother left to the web of her troubled life. Her father with religious care, took the trust she had given him, and once again began at the beginning of a young life. With the care of a faithful nurse, the little one, too young to know its loss, grew strong and well, and smiled with all its mother's beauty in answer to his caressing words. Only one injunction he disregarded of the message. As soon as the child was old enough to travel he sought its mother in all likely places. But in vain; and at length, when, after leaving

the child and nurse in London, he had journeyed to the manor-house only to learn that Raymond Vane and his wife had gone abroad for many years, he became disheartened, and determined to seek in a strange land a home for a time at least. Many reasons aided him in making up his mind to this step. The old German home recalled. with terrible earnestness, the memory of Gretchen; if it was sanctified by the memory of Cicely, it was darkened by Gretchen's unhappiness. Then, again, Margaret was not his; at any day she might be recalled to her father's house, for whatever strange reason she had been given to his care, and he wished that she might not feel the change so keenly as his poor Gretchen. To ensure this he took up his residence in a land where the language would be the same as her father's, and the customs not so violently opposed. London, or even the country parts of England, would have been better still for this preparation, but the old man felt he could not bear them. The wild, majestic beauty of a half-settled country in the New World better suited his artist soul, and the change of scene and active life afforded him less time for sad reflection. Leaving matters, therefore, so arranged that his poor Gretchen might, in case of need, be able to communicate with him, he turned his face towards the new country and soon found himself settled amid the strange scenes of the land which he had chosen.

Here seven long years went by without the call from the Old World for which he patiently waited. 'But at last, my little Gretchen,' he exclaimed joyfully, 'the silence has been broken: thy mother stretches out her beseeching hands for her father's help. In this letter, my child,' he continued, 'Gretchen tells me that the tie which held her to her English home has been broken, her husband is dead, and she crosses the ocean to seek me and her child. By the date she must have even now arrived; so to-morrow I will go for my poor child, and in a short time, my little one, thy mother shall hold thee in her arms."

The amazement, joy, and wonder of Gretchen may be imagined. To learn

that her mother was living, that she was soon to meet her, were indeed joyful tidings; but the knowledge of her unhappiness made her grieve in unison with the past.

The next morning broke fair and mild as one of May's fair month of days, and the old man departed on his glad journey, with the earnest prayers and wishes of Gretchen and Frederika for its success.

After the excitement of departure had subsided the long hours of the day grew weary, as time always does to those who sit and wait. To Gretchen it seemed as if noon would never come, and when midday rested upon the still, white-clad land her eager heart sighed for the distant evening.

Thus four days went by, and on the fifth, which broke in all the wild fury and pitiless pelting of a winter storm in that unsheltered region, poor little Gretchen's resolution to be patient suffered a severe trial.

Seating herself with her work in the deep window which commanded the best view of the road from the town, she spent the early hours of the day, but without having her watchfulness rewarded by the sight of a single passer-by.

At dinner, which she hardly tasted, Frederika strove to console her by telling her that it was not yet time; that perhaps the ship had not arrived; or, even if her mother had come, a lady like her could not travel in so great a

storm. These attempts of Frederika Gretchen received thankfully, for the child's natural sweetness of disposition always led her to appreciate an offered kindness; but they were not effective otherwise. Dinner over, she resumed a station by the window, and after a while sat wholly silent, her hands clasped in her lap, fascinated by the scene without, making to it a pretty contrasting picture in the old window, with her warm crimson dress and curling golden hair.

At last the blue eyes, which turned so steadfastly towards the distant town, were rewarded by the sight of a traveller on horseback. From the first point which afforded a glimpse of him the child watched the horse as he

picked his steps along the sunken, muddy road, and her astonishment was great at seeing his rider turn him towards their gateway. Summoning Frederika to the window, they both watched him pass through and approach the farm-house. Then, leaping from the saddle, he addressed Frederika, who had by this time opened the door, and stood, regardless of the storm, bareheaded upon the threshold.

Without entering the messenger briefly communicated his news. He had gone into the town in haste for the doctor for his child, who had been suddenly taken ill, but upon arriving at his house learnt that he was absent at the scene of a disaster which had taken place that morning. The stage from

A—— had met with an accident within a mile or two of the town, being upset over a high bank, and most of the passengers injured, the greater number but slightly, but a few very seriously. Among these latter was Jakob Dietz. The deep groan which Frederika gave from her honest heart at this awful news was almost lost in the quick, sharp scream of anguish which broke from Gretchen, followed by an agony of childish sobs.

Meanwhile Frederika stood silent and helpless, uncertain what to do or how to act. The man, who had waited for some decision or resolve, as we generally do from those to whom we communicate tidings that call for immediate action, finally, touched by

the despairing look in her face, said kindly:

"Perhaps, mistress, you would like to go to the old man at once. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do: I have medicine here for the little fellow, which will keep him easy until I can go in for the doctor with another horse and wagon, for his is broken down. Now, if you're ready in an hour, I'll stop for you, and take you into the town to the house where he is, and you can stay and nurse him until he's able to be brought home."

Frederika thanked him in broken English, and he, with a hearty "All right," was turning to go, when Gretchen rushed forward and grasped his sleeve: "Tell me," she said passionately "was the one with my grandfather hurt, or is she dead? Don't be afraid to tell me."

"With your grandfather?" echoed the man, surprised. "There was no one with him that I heard of."

"A strange lady, she means," explained Frederika, who for the moment had forgotten the old man's expected companion, "whom she expected with her grandfather."

"Well," rejoined the man, "I can't say positively, but all the names I heard of those in the accident belonged to people I know. It seems to me, too," he added, "that I'd have heard is there'd been a strange lady hurt. Anyhow, I wouldn't fret for her," he

continued consolingly, "till I knew for certain she came and was hurt."

Then, with a last injunction to the old woman to be ready punctually, he rode away, and the two entered the house with their sorrow, and longing again for the state of feverish impatience and weary waiting of the morning.

For, let argue who will, certainty is more horrible than the most cruel suspense. For while the latter lasts imagination may as often picture a happy result as paint the most woful ending, with equal probability of being right. Events, to be sure, are rarely so horrible or so perfectly happy as that powerful magician of our soul would make them; she often assumes

the appearance of her sister, Reality, but mimics and exaggerates her doings so that when the sober sister shows us the substance it rarely affects us as deeply as has the shadow, but the difference which gives the pain or joy is that, while we may and must appeal from the decision of the one, we can grasp the joy which Reality places in our hands, and must bear the burden of sorrow which she places upon us. And little Gretchen, bending beneath its unaccustomed weight, thought happiness was gone for ever.

Burying her face in her hands, she sat in the window-seat and sobbed on, unheeding Frederika's preparations for departure until, startled by an exclamation from that faithful soul, she raised

her eyes and saw her contemplating her with an expression of solemn wonder.

"Well, what is it, Frederika?" interrogated the child in a choking voice.
"What is the matter? Mr. Clark surely hasn't come back yet?"

"No, but I'm thinking, my little one," said the old woman wistfully, "what is to become of you?"

"Of me!" repeated the child. "Alas! I never thought of that." Then, springing up from her recumbent position, she put her arms round the old woman and continued bravely: "I know, Frederika, that I cannot go with you; I would be of no use, and grandfather, if he knew it, would not want me. But do not force me to go over to Mr.

Clark's house. I do not like to be with children when I feel so sad, and you know I am not used to their ways. Let me stay here with Fritz; he will take good care of me, and to-morrow you will bring grandfather home."

The objections which the old woman raised to this scheme were overruled. Fritz, to be sure, was still a most formidable protector, the house was well secured in the way of bolts and bars, and the state of the country was quiet; and above all she knew that the child was very shy and was never happy with those of her own age.

After this understanding the child repressed her grief somewhat, and assisted her nurse in the preparations for departure. Mr. Clark soon arrived, and Gretchen saw her drive away after loading her with a hundred messages to her grandfather, and receiving a solemn assurance from Frederika that she should be sent for, if nothing else were possible, in the morning.

With a brave bearing the child waved her hand for the last time to the old woman, and then, with a lonely, deserted feeling, closed and barred the door and seated herself once more in the window. For a long time she wept unrestrainedly, until from very exhaustion she fell asleep. When she awoke the short afternoon was fast fading into twilight. The rain had ceased, but the wind blew with awful violence and rocked the stout old house to its foundations. The sun had gone down,

but from west to east there stretched around the earth a belt of lurid light, rendering still more desolate the murky gray of earth and sky. With a start of surprise the child sprang up, and first attended to the fire, which, under such kindly care, soon burnt brightly. Then, opening the window, she, with some difficulty in the face of the furious wind, pulled in the heavy shutters and barred them with a sense of relief at closing out the desolate view and driving wind, which howled as if in pursuit. This accomplished, she drew out the table from the wall into the middle of the room; she lit the lamp, and by its cheerful rays proceeded to set the table for two, for, she argued "Fritz shall share my supper

with me to-night, as there are only we two."

As much to divert her mind as from desire for food, she proceeded to prepare it, and the hot, savory odor rising from the fire soon drew Fritz from his corner to the hearth. He seemed to notice the absence of her guardians and to be determined that every attention on his part should be offered to atone for it, licking her hand with fervor at every opportunity and regarding her with an almost human expression in his deep, grave eyes. Supper over, of which he appropriated by far the greater portion, he stretched his huge length before the leaping blaze, and followed Gretchen with his eyes as she washed the dishes and cleared

away the remains of the meal. Then, coming over to the fire, she took her accustomed low seat and drew out her little white rosary. "I will say it as often as I can until I become sleepy," she resolved, "and I will divide the three parts of each; the 'Joyful' shall be for my mother, that we may meet again; the 'Sorrowful' that God may pity my grandfather's sufferings; and the 'Glorious' that I may be resigned above all things to his will." Then, pressing her little crucifix to her lips, she was soon absorbed in earnest prayer. The dog watched for a time the beads drop from her fingers, and then, apparently convinced that she was happy, closed his eyes and slumbered quietly at her feet, with his

head resting upon his outstretched forepaws.

It was a charming picture in the long, low-roofed room, swept and garnished into such perfect cleanliness: the open, generous fire dancing in merry light upon the floor, which rivalled unsullied snow in whiteness, now gleaming on the polished tins and shining delf upon the walls, then resting on the fair, sweet face of Gretchen, framed in flowing, golden hair, tinting her dress with deeper crimson, and beaming upon the great animal at her feet until his eyes sparkled like gems in black setting.

The ticking of the great Dutch clock, which loudly marked Time's flight in the deep silence, had finally tolled

the hour of ten. Gretchen looked at its broad, familiar face, in amazement at the lateness of the hour, and rose immediately to retire, when a quick motion from the hound at her feet made her pause. Thus they remained for the moment—the child, with blanched face, turned towards the door, and the dog with his massive head thrown back and his eyes angrily watching in an attitude of the most profound attention. In another like brief space Gretchen fancied that in spite of the wind, which had somewhat lulled, she heard a footstep, and this idea was confirmed by the loud and furious baying of the hound, who sprang up and flew to the door, snarling and showing his teeth savagely.

Gretchen, terrified, fell on her knees speechless at the horror of her situation, but in her heart vehemently entreating God's protection.

Suddenly there came from without a cry for help as of nature's last despairing effort, piercing the air with awful sharpness. At that sound Gretchen sprang with a bound from her knees to the door and pulled back its heavy bolts, the dog close to her side. At last the door swung open, and Gretchen saw crouched against the door-step the form of a woman which an instinct, almost an inspiration, told her was her mother.

"O my mother!" she cried in her joy, "have you come at last?" And stooping, she lifted the wanderer in her young, strong arms.

Thus assisted, her mother entered the house which had so long awaited her, and, with the weariness of death upon her limbs, sank into the great arm-chair which Gretchen pulled before the fire.

The faintness which had seized her was partially dispelled by the drops of brandy which Gretchen hastened to administer, and the mother was enabled to contemplate the face of her child, and found her to be what her imaginings had pictured her—a repetition of her own grace and beauty, but with a heart untouched by ambition or yearnings for else beside the gifts that God had given.

"Tell me, my Gretchen," she said in the old, familiar tongue of Fatherland, "what hast thou thought of thy mother's absence from her child—that she was cold and ungrateful for so great a blessing?"

"No, never that, mother," replied the child. "I only knew I had a mother when grandfather told me you were coming; and he said that you would tell me why you stayed so long away."

"And so I will, my little one," replied the mother, "that it may prove to thee that God knows best, and places us in this life, not where we love most, but where we best may serve him. I forgot this, my child, and reaped the bitter harvest of sorrow and of sin which my own hand had sowed. I left my humble station and my kind father to fulfil the brilliant future which my dreams had

pictured me. But, ah! my God," she exclaimed, shaken with remorse, "I purchased earthly happiness at a fearful price. Thy father, my child," she continued, "was not of my faith and violently opposed to it. He had married me, fondly hoping that my youth and timidity would quickly yield to his love and influence. The horror with which I recoiled from the first shock against my religion made him pause, but not relent. He tried in vain to shake my faith by irony and ridicule, but the supernatural gift was beyond his human power; he, therefore, appealed to my will by every means at his command, and after many struggles I finally yielded and consented to deny my God.

"But, like all sinners, from that hour remorse poisoned every drop of happiness. Sleeping or waking, I seemed to hear a voice within my heart reproaching me as one who, like Judas, had betrayed my Lord for a miserable pittance. At last, my Gretchen, when thou wast laid within my arms, I resolved that my sin should not rob thee of thy best inheritance. Therefore I had thee secretly baptized, and as soon as an opportunity offered left thee to my father's care. I could not meet him and tell him the awful truth; I rather left him in ignorance of the strange cause which placed thee in his protecting arms. During the search which ensued, the many strange surmises, as to thy disappearance never came near

the truth, and we returned to England only to leave it again after a dissatisfied residence of a few months. Three more years passed, and then in sunny Naples an infant son was given to us. My husband, proud and joyful, returned to England, and, as the baby grew into a boy, devoted himself to his education. And truly, Gretchen, thy brother was indeed almost peerless in his bright, boyish beauty and grace of bearing. Even I forgot for a while my sin, and at times fancied myself happy. But this state, a hundred-fold worse than the first, was destined to be shattered by one of those awful blows with which God tears asunder the veil which our guilty hands have woven to conceal him from us.

"One clear, bright autumn day I stood upon the terrace of my husband's mansion and watched him and our boy go towards the lake for a sail—an amusement of which little Raymond was particularly fond. Two hours later their bodies, locked in the cold embrace of death, were taken from its treacherous depths. A sudden squall, preceding a violent shower of rain, had overtaken the little boat when crowded with sail at some distance from the shore, and before assistance could reach them both had perished.

"O God! my child, may you never know the anguish of an hour when, crushed with awful woe, you are afraid to call on God to lighten it or give you strength to bear it. Prostrate I lay, unable to roll away the stone my impious hands had placed at the door of my heart, and afraid to look upon the face of the angel Sorrow, whom he had sent in mercy.

"Such was the agony to which I awoke from a deep swoon upon hearing the awful tidings, which I endured until all funeral rites were paid, and the dead slept in the family vault their long, still sleep; then, like a guilty thing, I fled in the night from the paradise my act had poisoned. Without purpose or direction, I wandered until I came to London, and there, exhausted in body and mind, fell sick of a fever. The woman in whose lodgings I was taken ill proved in truth a good Samaritan, and when, after long delirium, I woke, a priest was by my bedside, and my confession brought relief to my tortured soul. As soon as I was able I resolved to come to my poor father and you, my child, and accordingly embarked on my long voyage. Weary with travel, I arrived in the town to-night and enquired the direction, but could find no conveyance to bring me to my destination.

"The longing which filled my heart to see you, my child, grew maddening, when, conscious that only a few miles separated us, I set out to walk, but on the way encountered a teamster, who offered me a seat in his wagon, which I gladly accepted, for I felt that I had begun a hopeless undertaking.

"When we reached a turn in the

road just below, the man pointed out the light to me, apologizing for being unable to bring me any further, as the roads were very heavy and up-hill. I thanked him, and, giving him some money, alighted and commenced my painful walk. At last I reached the threshold, but there sank half-fainting on the door-step. After a while I roused myself to give a cry for help. You heard and came."

Gretchen then explained to her mother why her grandfather and nurse were absent, but added she was sure they would return on the morrow. With deep interest her mother enquired about the accident, but the child could give her only the meagre intelligence which Mr. Clark had brought.

As Gretchen sat at her mother's feet, gazing upon the wan, worn beauty of that sad face, she observed that the excitement of their meeting had subsided and left her still weaker than before. Her face, even to her lips, was deathly white, and she pressed at intervals her hand upon her side, as if in pain.

Finally, yielding to the child's entreaties, her mother determined to retire, and Gretchen showed her to her room and assisted her in preparations for the night, for her weakness was gradually growing worse.

Then, extinguishing the light, she lay down beside her. For a long time she kept awake, listening to the faint, irregular breathing of her mother; but at last, tired and worn out by the

exciting events of the day, she fell asleep.

She was roused towards morning by a feeble groan, and, springing from bed, rushed to her mother's side, and screamed in terror as she saw her face changed and distorted by a violent spasm.

"Mother! O mother! what shall I do?" she cried. "Are you dying? Oh! speak to me. Tell me what I can do for you."

In a few moments the features relaxed and the spasms subsided. Her mother asked for a small bottle which she would find in the pocket of her dress, and upon the administration of a few drops seemed much relieved. She was enabled to speak,

and held the child by the hand as she cried:

"Gretchen, I am dying; I feel it and know it by this awful pain here," pressing her heart. "I knew it must end my life soon, but this journey has hastened it. Only one thing troubles me: I must die without the sacraments. Therefore I would like you to read the prayers for the dying in case I am unable to speak to you when the last hour comes. Will you, my child, control your grief and do this?"

As her mother uttered this request in broken, gasping sentences, Gretchen had sobbed bitterly, but now she raised her head and said bravely:

"Surely, mother, God will not take you from me so soon. I will pray to him and he will make you strong again. But, however," she continued, as her mother shook her head feebly, "you can see a priest easily. He does not live far, and I can go for him and bring him back."

The expression of joy which came over her mother's face told Gretchen how much her promise had relieved her. She therefore determined to go immediately. Kneeling down, she fervently begged God to grant her mother's wish, and, if it were his will that she must die, not to summon her unstrengthened by his holy aids. Then, arranging the medicine within easy reach of the sufferer, she arrayed herself in warm outdoor garments and softly drew the heavy bolts.

Summoning Fritz to follow her, she threw it open and stepped out into the cold, gray morning.

The priest's house lay close to the church, which was a couple of miles distant by the road, but within a few moments' access if one crossed the brook. Gretchen, therefore, determined upon taking this course, and a few moments' brisk walking brought her to its banks; but she shrank terrified at its awful aspect. Wide and deep, it swept with an angry rushing against the banks it had caressed in summer. The faces of the six large stones used to ford it were just visible where their dark, wet surface rose at intervals from its raging bosom, and the child saw that to cross it would be a hazardous un-

dertaking. Still, she was not deterred. Remembering her important errand, she murmured a devout ejaculation to that Mother for whom, through all the years of her child-life, she had cherished a great and peculiar love; then, placing one foot upon the nearest stone, she cautiously endeavored to reach the next at a comparatively still moment, and in this way succeeded, in spite of a few slips, in reaching the other shore with no worse mishap than a pair of wet feet. Looking back, she saw that Fritz had been unable to emulate her courage, and stood wistfully regarding her from the opposite bank, but afraid to risk his aged limbs in the swift current. Knowing that it was useless to coax him to try what his affection could not

prompt him to undertake, she hastened on her way and soon arrived at the priest's house.

The housekeeper informed her that he had only just returned from a very distant sick-call, and was resting, but took her message, and returned with the answer that he would come immediately.

Refusing the housekeeper's invitation to take a cup of coffee which she was preparing, Gretchen hastened on her way home, and soon arrived at the perilous crossing. Fritz, from his station on the opposite side, wagged his tail and testified great joy at seeing her return.

The child placed her foot upon the stone, but found this crossing much more difficult. A strong wind blew in her face, and she was cold and numb with fatigue and hunger. She was seized with an awful dizziness, and terrified with the thunderous rushing which resounded in her ears. She made a spring, but missed, and in one instant was at the mercy of the cruel waters.

Her piercing shriek was echoed by a frantic howl from Fritz, who sprang to the rescue of his beloved little mistress, but in vain. His strength was unequal to his noble intention, and in that cold, gray dawn, which heralded to the earth another day, the angry, foaming waves closed upon the child and her intended preserver.

There remains but little to be told. The priest soon arrived at the farmhouse, and, finding that the child had not returned, suspected the fatal truth. Summoning assistance to the dying woman's bedside, he departed for the town, there meeting Frederika and the old man just setting out for the farm-house. Jakob Dietz's injuries were not as serious as had been at first supposed. At first he listened to the tidings of the priest in silence, and bowed his white head in submission to the divine decree which only permitted the loved wanderer to return to die within his arms; but when he went on to speak of the fate which he feared. had overtaken his grandchild, his human love rose rampant against the

hand which had cut so dear a tie from his solitary, lonely life.

The priest, a man singularly gifted with penetration, wisely forbore to even lightly touch so raw a wound; therefore, only cautioning Frederika to be cautious in telling the awful news to the mother, he departed, and the two so stricken in years and sorrow set out for their desolate home.

The gorgeous sunset of the cold winter's day had turned all the small diamond-paned windows of the old house to deepest crimson color, when the priest slowly drove up to the door.

Entering, he noticed an unusual hush and reverence among many people moving about, and, advancing into the large household room, he saw

upon a bier, in all the cold marble perfection of that mysterious Sculptor's works, the body of little Gretchen, with a sweet, calm expression upon the childish face, as of one who had gladly thrown off old garments to draw round her the priceless robe of immortality.

Near her bier sat the old man, regarding with a passionate expression of grief the image of his darling. The priest drew near and questioned him about the mother, but received only the shortest possible replies. Every faculty seemed numbed with woe, and the priest could see that his heart was far from being resigned to the will of God.

"Jakob Dietz," he said solemnly,

 "will you, then, after following Jesus so patiently through all his suffering way, refuse to take the last step? Will you, like a few unhappy ones among the martyrs, refuse to suffer the last pang, and so lose the merit of all that had gone before? Happiness is often a weight which chains us here; sorrow and suffering the wings by which we rise to the crown which God sets in the heavens. Will you not be generous and give when God holds out his hands?"

The old man, startled by this sudden exposition of his secret thoughts, was recalled from his wandering to that narrow path of self-sacrifice in which, from early youth, his feet had trodden. Without a word he rose, pressed his lips to the forehead of the beautiful corpse, and led the way to the bedside of the mother. She rested quietly and calmly, worn out by violent spasms, and waiting calmly for the end, which came even as the priest stood by her bedside, and, like the clear sunset of a gray and troubled day, foretold a happy morrow.

In the still, quiet graveyard on the hillside the long, green summer grass waves against the white cross which marks the spot where Gretchen and her mother rest, almost within sound of the brook which the child had so loved in life, and which brought her so cruel a death. The old man and Frederika still dwell within the old house, now sanctified to them by the memory of

the beloved dead, and not far from the house Fritz lies buried, where a rude shield rising from the ground bears the record of his noble act, thus honoring a dog of whom it might be truly said "that he possessed beauty without vanity, strength without insolence, and courage without ferocity."

THE END.











